LONDON WAS FULL OF ROOMS

edited by

Tully Barnett, Helen Bloxham, Tyd Harper, Rob Hocking and Graham Tullis

London may have many rooms, but is there space for the travelling colonist? This collection of essays, memoirs and poems was initially inspired by the Malaysian writer Lee Koo Ling’s admonition titled London from New York To Me: Victoria To London from the anti-colonial perspective. These impressions contribute to the discussion about the beguiling attractions of the world’s first metropolis. Did they have it for themselves or London? Did they think London belonged to them? Did they thought it belonged to London? London: A Full of Rooms provides a diverse range of responses to these provocative questions.
Contents

Preface xi
Acknowledgements xiii

Part 1:

Syd Harrex  ■  London and After: The Genesis of Lee Kok Liang’s Fiction 3
John Barnes  ■  The Loneliness of Living in English: An Appreciation of Lee Kok Liang 14
Lee Kok Liang Meets Encounter Magazine Editors
Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol 27
Spender’s Letter Valorising Lee Kok Liang’s ‘Return to Malaya’ 33
Lesley Wyndram  ■  Lee Kok Liang: At the Centre, On the Outer 34
Kristy Schubert  ■  Fragments and Fragmentation: Aspects of the Representation of London in Lee Kok Liang’s Sketches & Vignettes & Brush Strokes 39
Tully Barnett  ■  ‘Lucky Escape’: Sexuality and Otherness in Lee Kok Liang’s London Does Not Belong To Me and Sketches & Vignettes & Brush Strokes 55
Syd Harrex  ■  ‘Dying Musings of Ivor Gurney’ 67
Syd Harrex & Etienne Fennell  ■  Lessons of Three Masters—Henry James, Marcel Proust & James Joyce—in London Does Not Belong to Me 68
Bernard Wilson  ■  ‘Why Can’t I Talk?’: Aphasia and Social Devolution in Lee Kok Liang’s Malaysian Fiction 91
Henry Lawson  ■  ‘The Rush to London’ 1900 99

Part 2:

Peter Morton  ■  ‘Everyone I Met in London Came from Elsewhere’ 102
Peter Morton  ■  ‘Polluted with the Diseases and Vices of Centuries’: Writers Negating London, 1880–1914 108
Victor Daley  ■  ‘When London Calls’ 126
Margaret Allen  ■  So Complete is the Exile of London’s Poorest from Civilisation: Catherine Martin Encounters London 128

Graham Tulloch  ■ Walter Murdoch’s London

Rick Hosking  ■ John Lang—Australia, London, India: Where was Home?

Tom Shapcott  ■ London, 1972, and First Impressions

Tom Shapcott  ■ ‘London 1972’

Peter Manthorpe  ■ London from Sea-level

K.S. Maniam  ■ Mr K in the UK

Laurie Duggan  ■ ‘London Calling’

Laurie Hergenhan  ■ Writing London: Writing to, Writing from, Writing back, Writing ...

Michael X. Savvas  ■ Low Sentiments in *The High Commissioner*

Susan Hosking  ■ ‘The Coo-ee Couple: Australian Colonials in London in Patrick White’s *The Twyborn Affair*’

Andrew Taylor  ■ ‘London Again’

Robert Phiddian  ■ One Who Didn’t Get Away: Bruce Petty Goes to London

Phil Butters  ■ Performing Australianness in *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie*

Giselle Bastin  ■ The Innocent’s a Broad!: Depictions of Australians in London in *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* and *Diana and Me*

Syd Harrex  ■ ‘Aussie in London’

Ben Kooyman  ■ ‘Back in the Bloody Smoke’: Dark Fantasy, Dark Reality: London in the Comic Books *V for Vendetta* and *Hellblazer*

Carol Hetherington  ■ London Calling? Long-Distance Connections in Australian Literature

John McLaren  ■ Vincent Buckley: On the Edges of Melbourne, London and Dublin

About the Authors of Chapters
Preface

Waterloo Station – moulty, nasty, cold, opaque slabs of glass – dirty floor –
silent green coaches – the trundle of the carriers
Lee Kok Liang, Sketches & Vignettes & Brush Strokes

Most of the contributors to this volume first delivered earlier versions of these papers at the conference ‘Writing London’, held in Penneshaw on Kangaroo Island between 7 and 10 December 2003, and organised by Flinders University’s Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English (CRNLE). The conference was centered on Lee Kok Liang’s posthumously published first novel London Does Not Belong to Me—a novel which describes the experiences of a young man from Malaysia in the Imperial centre—but also invited papers that dealt with other interpretations of the theme. How do writers from other parts of the world write about London? What are their reactions to the Imperial centre? This book reflects the directions of the conference and is therefore divided into two sections. The first section deals specifically with research about Lee Kok Liang, his London journal and novel as well as some contextual information about his Malaysian writings. The second section of this book extends the theme of writing London to much wider boundaries.

Lee Kok Liang (1927–1992) came from a middle class family, formerly from Kedah and then living in Penang. As a young man, he began studying law at Melbourne University and then finished the degree and was admitted to the Bar at Lincoln’s Inn, London. He was expected to return to Malaya to practise law and look after his family—obligations which he lived up to dutifully. However, even from his time in Melbourne, he was writing fiction and taking part in student publishing, balancing his studies of law and politics with his passion for literature. The author’s journal of London and Paris (1932–1954) reflects his dedication to writing and gives new insight into his creative processes.

Lee Kok Liang’s journal also illuminates the author’s social interactions during his time in London in the early- to mid-1950s. Rather than socialising with local Londoners, Lee formed a circle of friends and acquaintances composed almost entirely of expatriates from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, West Africa, and South and South-East Asia; these were people Lee had met while studying at Melbourne University, as well as new ‘expat’ friends made in London. As the chapters in the first section of the book focus on Lee’s home country both during the colonial era and, from 1963, the post-Independence period, country and nation are referred to accordingly; that is, Malaya, Malaysia, Malaya/Malaysia.
Dr Syd Harrex developed a friendship with Lee Kok Liang during the last thirteen years of the Malaysian author's life—a friendship that led to him being given manuscripts of Lee's London journal and of his first novel. After Lee's death, Harrex and his then postgraduate student Bernard Wilson began editing these early manuscripts for publication.

The second half of this book collects chapters dealing with London's other visitors. These are interspersed with pieces that deal with the same theme by creative writers such as Catherine Helen Spence and Andrew Taylor. One or two chapters look at other cities (Cambridge and Dublin for example), or compare London with other metropolitan centres. They offer a range of observations about the ways writers, poets, graphic artists, cartoonists and screenwriters have represented London in their literary endeavours and in their lives.

Above all, this book represents the myriad of complex relationships between writers and London, and shows that, despite a changing world, the cultural richness of London continues to be balanced and assessed against exclusion, struggle, even humiliation, and a process of adjustment that some will never complete.